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Zimbabweans see corruption on the increase, feel helpless to fight it

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 25 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Transparency International consistently ranks Zimbabwe among the most corrupt countries in the world (156th out of 175 countries in its 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index). In the latest Afrobarometer survey, a majority of adult Zimbabweans say that the level of corruption in the country has increased over the past year. A majority believe that most or all members of the police force are involved in corrupt activities, and a substantial proportion of respondents say they paid bribes to procure identity documents or avoid problems with the police. Most Zimbabweans say the government is performing badly in its fight against the scourge.

Incidents of corruption are under-reported for a variety of reasons, including fear of adverse consequences, and many Zimbabweans appear to feel helpless to combat corruption. Nonetheless, a majority believe that the news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by the Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 2,400 adult Zimbabweans in November 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

Key findings

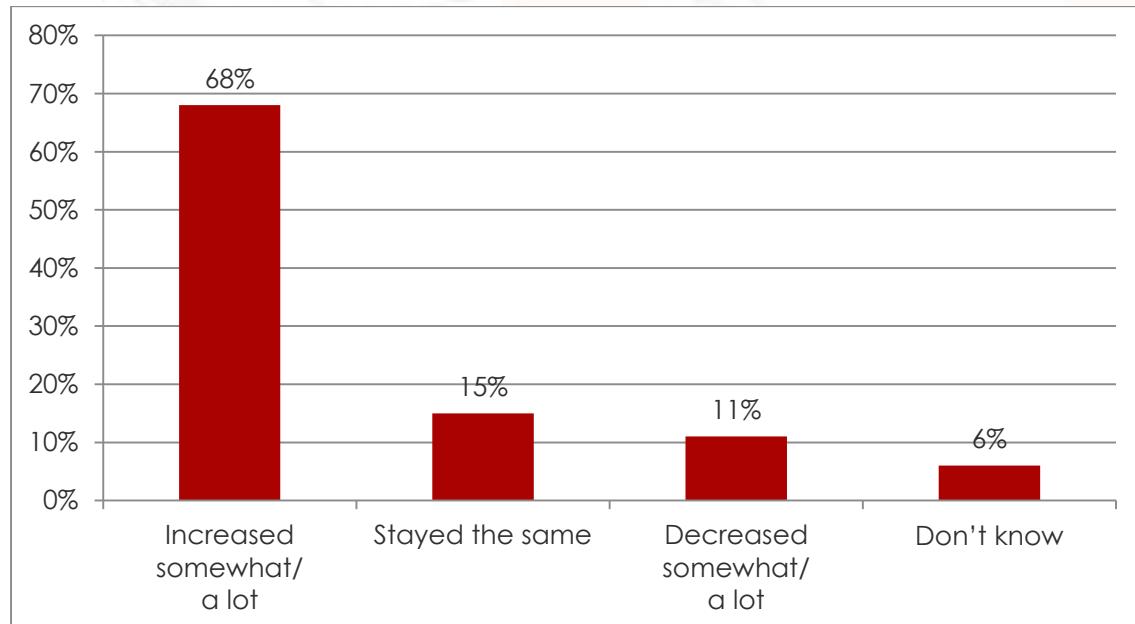
- More than two-thirds (68%) of adult Zimbabweans believe the level of corruption has increased over the past year, including 48% who say it has increased "a lot."
- A majority (58%) of respondents say that "most" or "all" members of the police force are corrupt.
- One-quarter (25%) of respondents who obtained an identity document (such as a birth certificate, driver's licence, passport, voter's card, or permit) in the previous year say they paid a bribe in order to get the documents. Paying bribes was almost equally common (24%) among those who had contact with the police.

- The government gets poor marks for its handling of the corruption scourge: 80% say the government is doing “badly” or “very badly” in fighting corruption. Nevertheless, the ruling party is seen as better able to address corruption problems than the opposition.
- A general sense of resignation about fighting corruption is reflected in the most common perceptions of steps that citizens can take (“Ordinary people cannot do anything”) and of reasons that corruption incidents are not reported to authorities (fear of negative consequences and “nothing will be done”).
- Six of 10 Zimbabweans (61%) believe the news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption, although only 42% believe that the news media is “somewhat” or “very” effective in the fight against corruption.

Zimbabweans see corruption on the increase

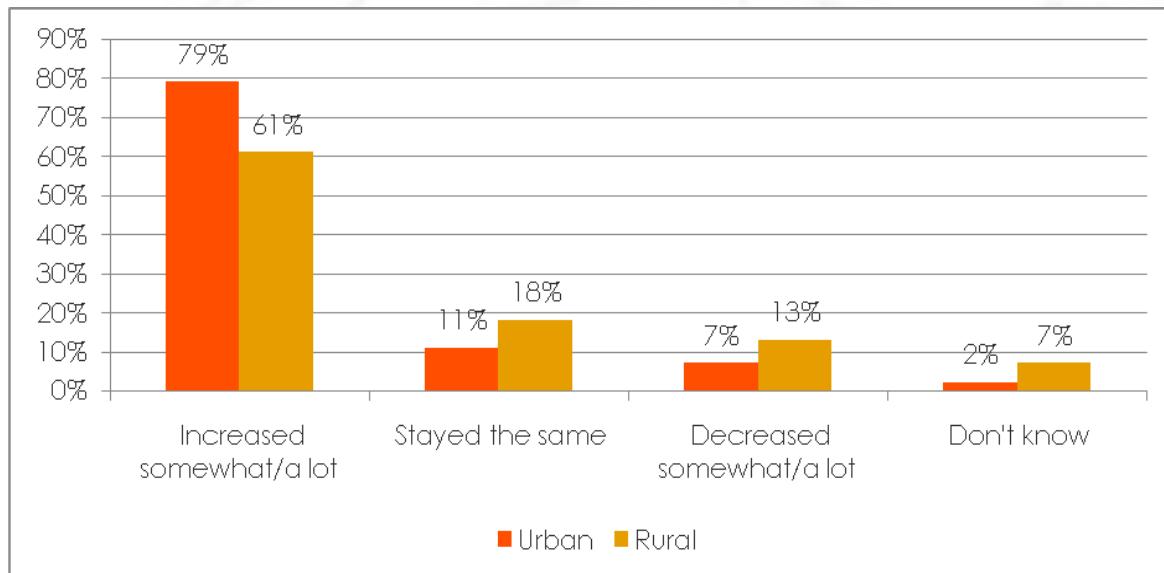
Nearly seven in 10 Zimbabweans (68%) believe the level of corruption has increased over the past year, including nearly half (48%) who say it has increased “a lot” (Figure 1). More urban than rural residents say corruption has increased, 79% vs. 61% (Figure 2). Men are slightly more likely than women to share this view (70% vs. 66%).

Figure 1: Perceptions of increased corruption | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Figure 2: Perceptions of increased corruption | by respondent location | 2014



Perceptions of who is corrupt

The police are most widely perceived as corrupt, with almost three in five Zimbabweans (58%) saying that “most” or “all” members of the police force are involved in corruption (Table 1). Second-worst is the organisation mandated to collect revenue for the government (Zimbabwe Revenue Authority), perceived as largely corrupt by 46% of the population, followed by local government councillors and central government officials (41% each) and business executives (39%). Members of Parliament, the president and officials in his office, and judges and magistrates are less likely to be seen as corrupt than other government officials.

Religious and traditional leaders are least likely to be perceived as corrupt: About one in five respondents say that “most” or “all” of them are involved in corruption. Still, 70% of respondents say that at least “some” of these leaders are corrupt.

Table 1: Perceptions of involvement in corruption | Zimbabwe | 2014

	Most/all of them	Some of them	None of them	Don't know
Police	58%	31%	6%	4%
Zimbabwe Revenue Authority	46%	34%	6%	14%
Local councillors	41%	43%	9%	7%
Government officials	41%	44%	7%	8%
Business executives	39%	42%	8%	12%
Members of Parliament	38%	44%	8%	9%
President and officials in his office	30%	41%	16%	12%
Judges and magistrates	29%	49%	11%	11%
Traditional leaders	22%	48%	18%	12%
Religious leaders	19%	51%	24%	6%

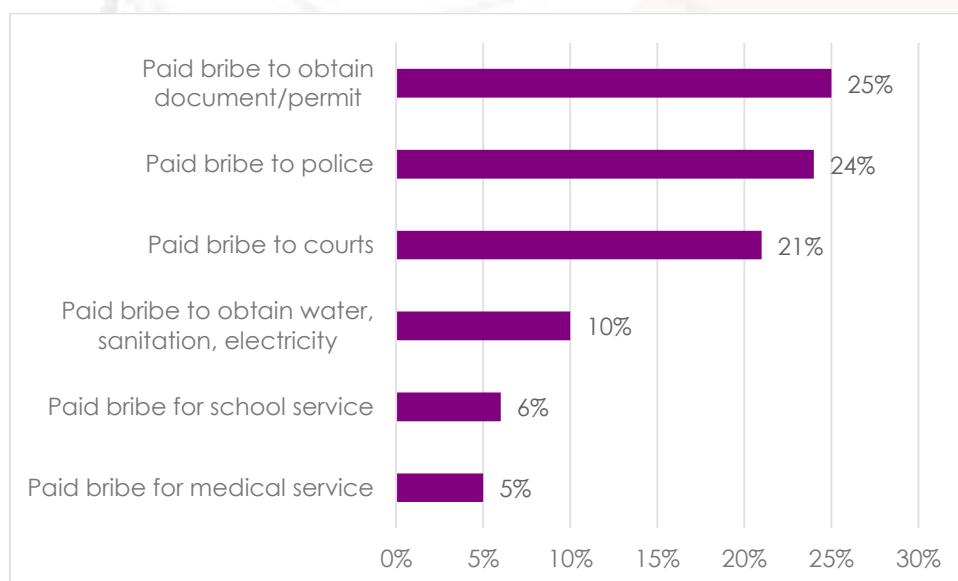
Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

From perceptions to reality: Paying bribes

Survey respondents were asked whether they had tried to obtain a variety of government services during the previous year and, if so, whether they had to "pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour" in order to obtain the desired service. Results show significant differences in the incidence of bribery across various services. Strikingly, one-quarter (25%) of the 1,046 respondents who tried to obtain an identity document (such as a birth certificate, driver's licence, passport, voter's card, or a permit) say they paid a bribe "once or twice" or "often" in order to get the document (Figure 3). Similarly, 24% of the 563 respondents who had contact with the police during the previous 12 months say they paid a bribe in order to obtain assistance or avoid problems.

Zimbabweans also report paying bribes to get assistance from the courts (21%) and to obtain water, sanitation, or electric services (10%). About one in 20 respondents say they paid bribes to obtain services in public medical facilities or schools.

Figure 3: Payment of bribes to obtain services or avoid problems | Zimbabwe | 2014

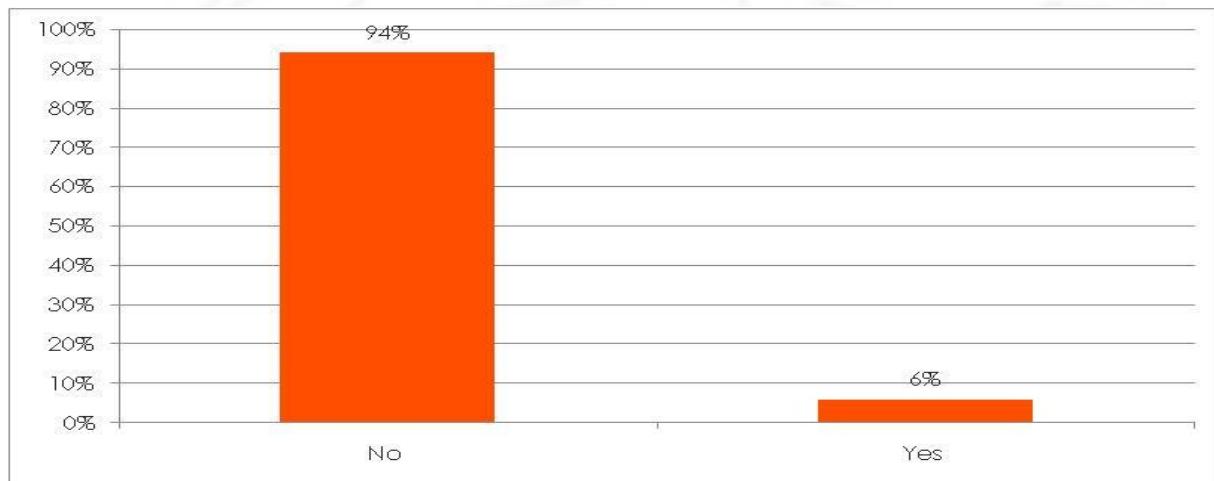


Respondents who tried to obtain government services during the previous year were asked: And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a government official in order to get the [desired service]?

Reporting of bribery incidents to authorities

Survey respondents who paid a bribe to obtain services or avoid problems during the previous year (n=394) were asked whether they reported these incidents to a government official or authority. Only 6% say they reported the bribery incidents to authorities, while 94% say they did not (Figure 4).

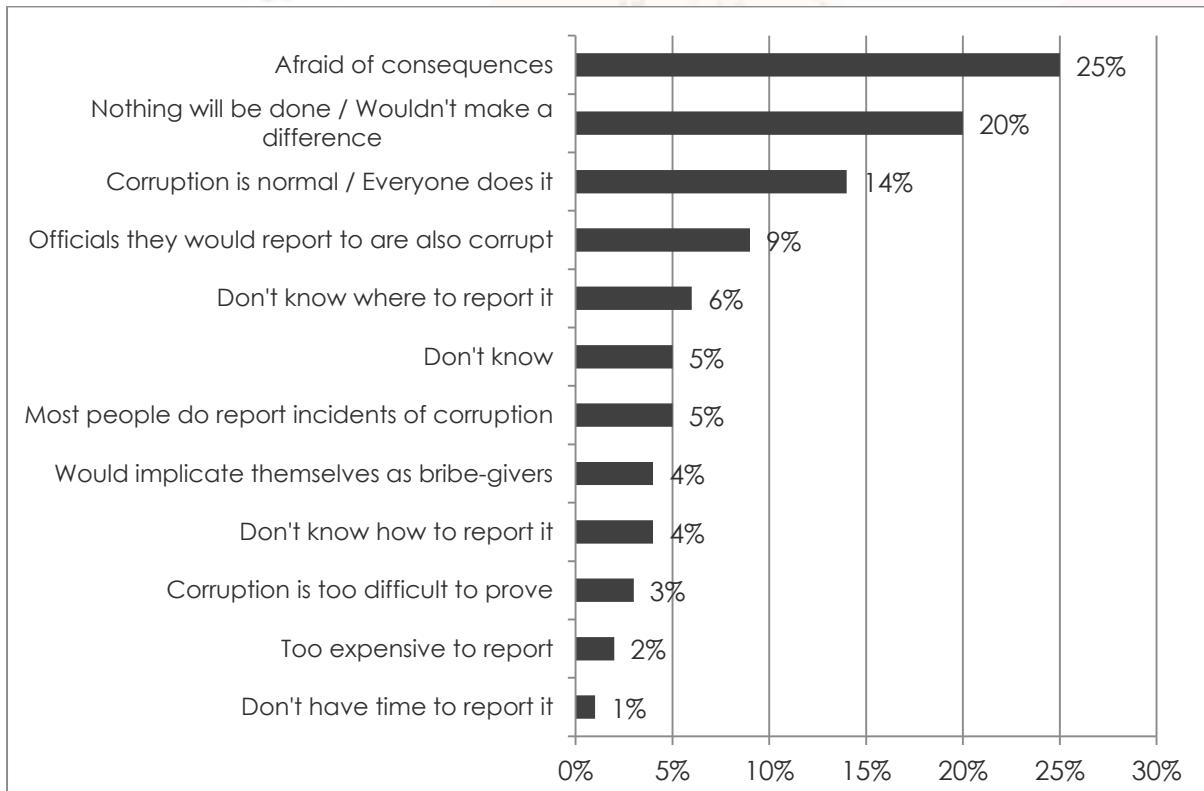
Figure 4: Reporting of bribery incidents to authorities | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: If you ever paid a bribe for any of the services discussed above, did you report any of the incidents you mentioned to a government official or someone in authority? (n=394)

When asked what they think is the main reason why many people do not report corruption when it occurs, the most commonly cited reasons are fear of adverse consequences (mentioned by 25% of all respondents) and the expectation that nothing will be done about it (20%) (Figure 5). Other reasons include that corruption is a normal part of life (14%) and that the officials one can report to are themselves corrupt (9%).

Figure 5: Reasons that incidents of corruption are not reported | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Some people say that many incidents of corruption are never reported. Based on your experience, what do you think is the main reason why many people do not report corruption when it occurs?

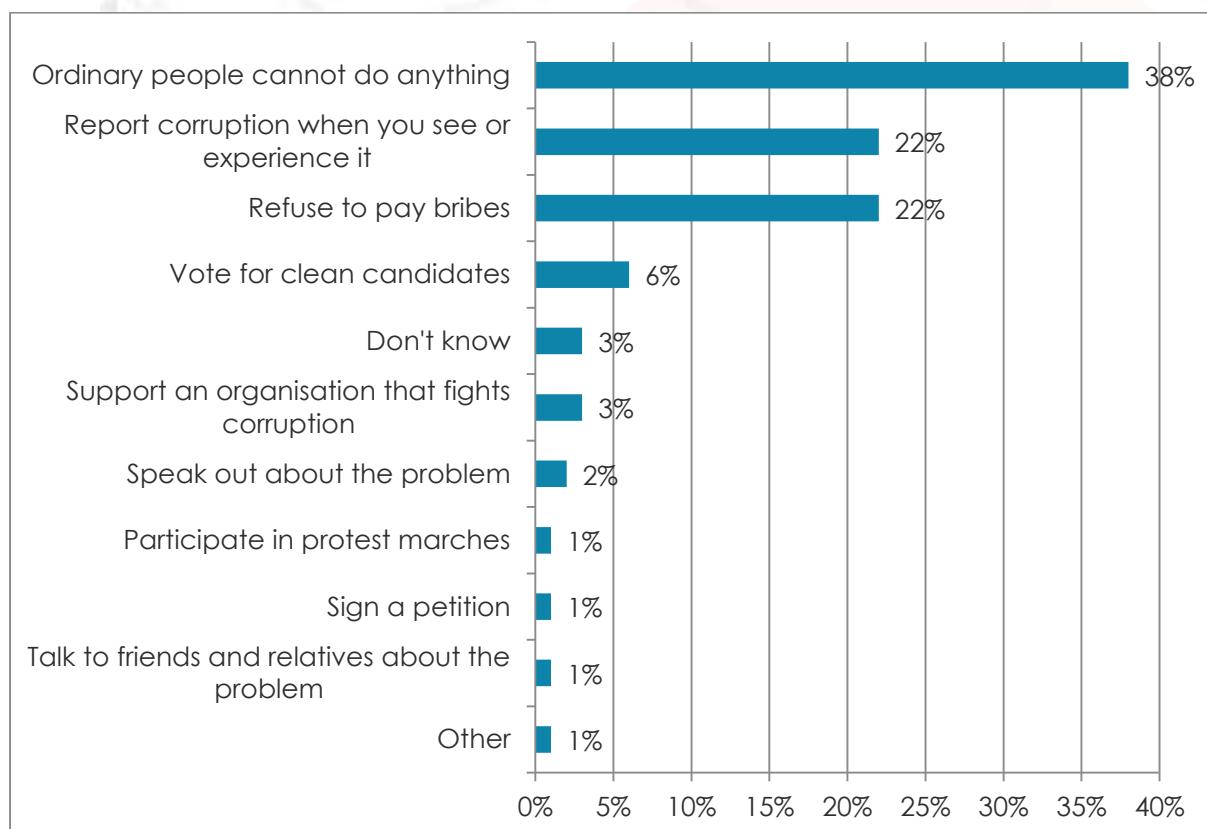
General sense of helplessness in the fight against corruption

There is a palpable sense of helplessness at the individual level with regard to corruption in Zimbabwe. When asked whether they think ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption, half (50%) of respondents say they cannot, compared to 42% who say they can. Urban residents are more likely than their rural counterparts to believe that ordinary citizens can make a difference, 47% vs. 39%.

Similarly, when asked what is the most effective thing that an ordinary person can do to help combat corruption, the most common response (by 38% of respondents) is that there is nothing that ordinary people can do (Figure 6). Rural respondents (40%) are somewhat more likely to give this response than their urban counterparts (35%). Among those who don't share this sense of helplessness, the most common suggestions are to refuse to pay bribes and to report corruption when one sees or experiences it (22% each).

Figure 6: Most effective things that ordinary citizens can do to fight corruption

| Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: What is the most effective thing that an ordinary person like you can do to help combat corruption in this country?

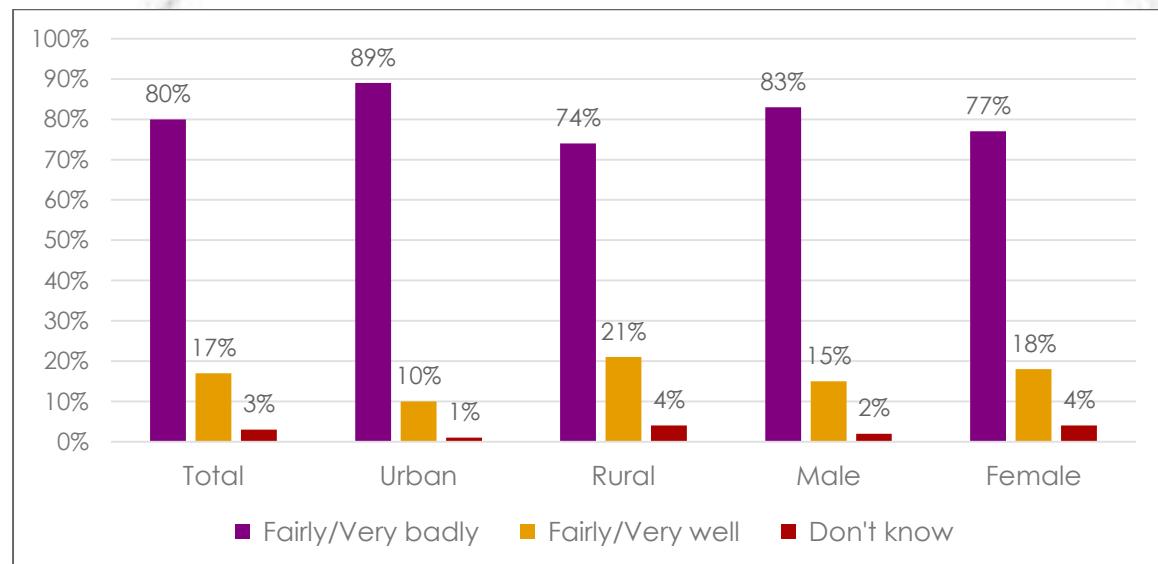
Government rates poorly in fight against corruption

Fully eight in 10 Zimbabweans (80%) say the government is faring badly in fighting corruption in government, including more than half (54%) who say it is doing "very badly" (Figure 7). Less than one-fifth (17%) say the government is doing a good job in terms of fighting the corruption scourge.

The sentiment that the government has failed in this regard is more pronounced among urban (69%) than rural (44%) dwellers. It is also slightly stronger among men (57%) than among women (50%).

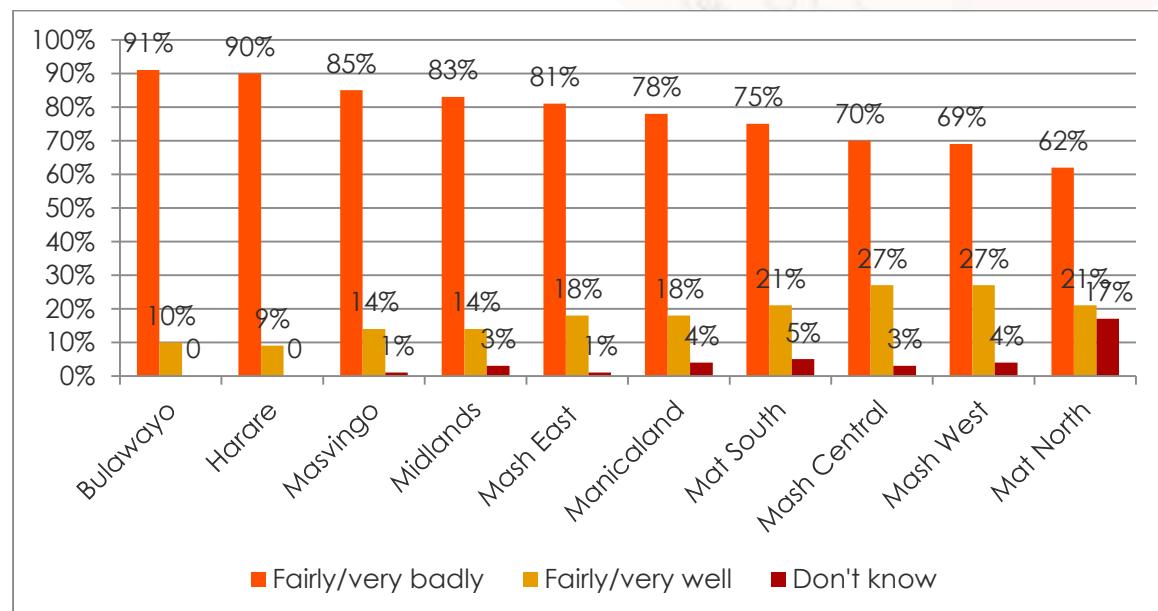
A majority of respondents in every administrative province give the government a poor rating for its anti-corruption efforts, ranging from 62% in Matabeleland North to 91% in Bulawayo province (Figure 8), traditionally an opposition stronghold. Matabeleland North, which has poorly developed information infrastructure, also has the highest proportion of respondents (17%) who say they “don't know” how the government is performing.

Figure 7: Assessment of government's fight against corruption | by gender and location | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government?

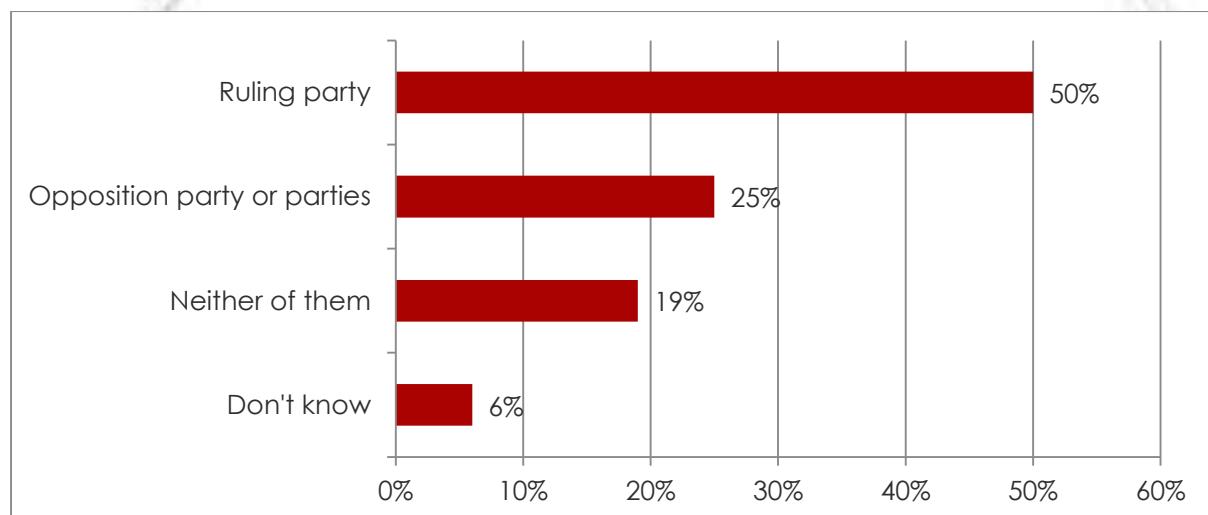
Figure 8: Assessment of government's fight against corruption | by province | 2014



Despite the strong feeling that the ZANU-PF government has failed to fight corruption effectively, half (50%) of survey respondents say the ruling party is better able to deal with corruption in government than the opposition (Figure 9). One-quarter (25%) believe that opposition parties are better placed to fight corruption, while 19% say that neither the government nor opposition parties are most able to fight corruption.

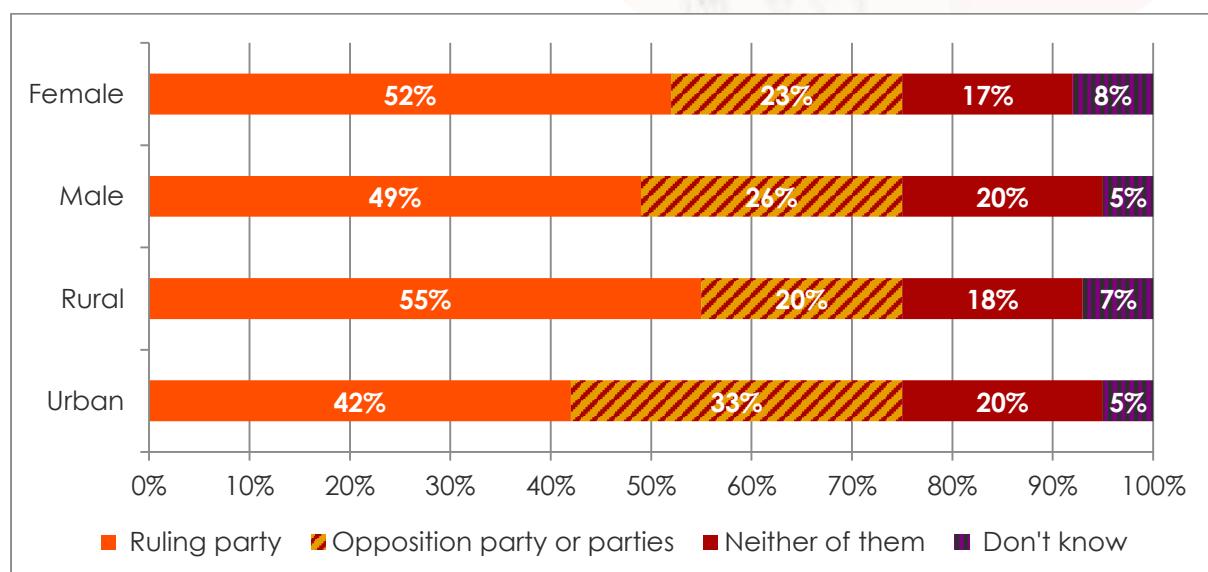
More rural respondents (55%) than urbanites (42%) see the ruling party as the organisation most able to fight corruption in government (Figure 10). Conversely, more urbanites (33%) than rural dwellers (20%) believe that opposition parties are better placed to take on the issue of corruption.

Figure 9: Political parties best able to fight corruption | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Looking at the ruling and opposition political parties in this country, which would you say is most able to address each of the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government?

Figure 10: Political parties best able to fight corruption | by gender and location | Zimbabwe | 2014

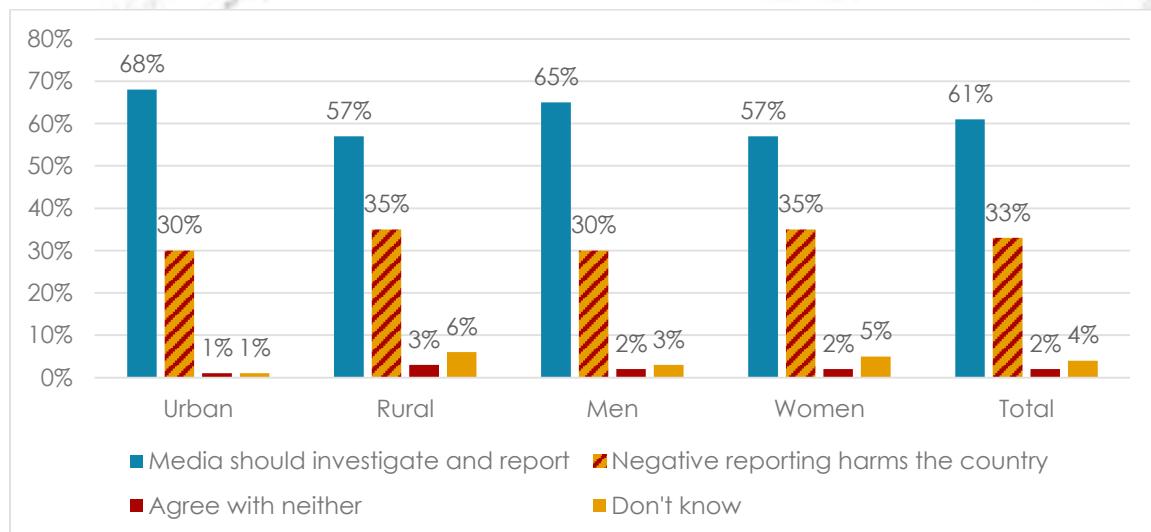


Perceptions of news media role in the fight against corruption

Six in 10 Zimbabweans (61%) say the news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption, while one-third (33%) believe that too much such reporting is detrimental to the country (Figure 11).

Urban and male respondents are somewhat more likely than rural residents and women to support the news media's watchdog role.

Figure 11: Perceptions of media role in fighting corruption | Zimbabwe | 2014



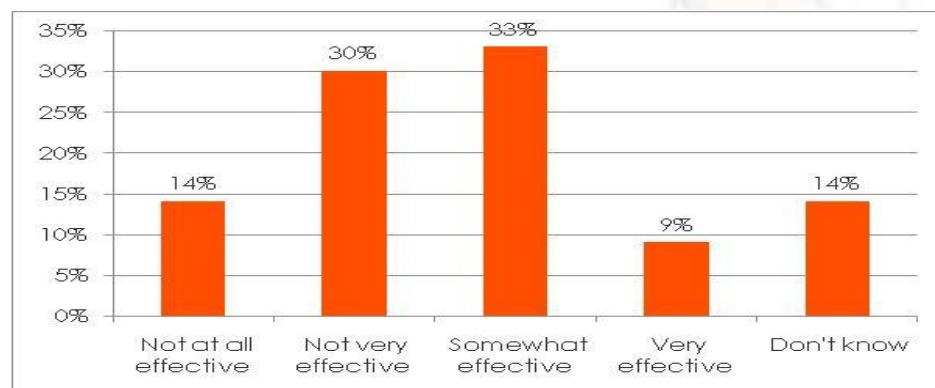
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.

Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.

Zimbabweans are divided as to how effective the news media is in revealing government mistakes and corruption: 42% say the media is "somewhat effective" or "very effective, while 44% say it is "not very effective" or "not at all" (Figure 12). Urbanites are more critical of the media than rural dwellers, with 20% vs. 11% saying the media is "not at all effective."

Figure 12: Media effectiveness in revealing government mistakes and corruption | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: In this country, how effective is the news media in revealing government mistakes and corruption?

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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